

# A monument to the fallen

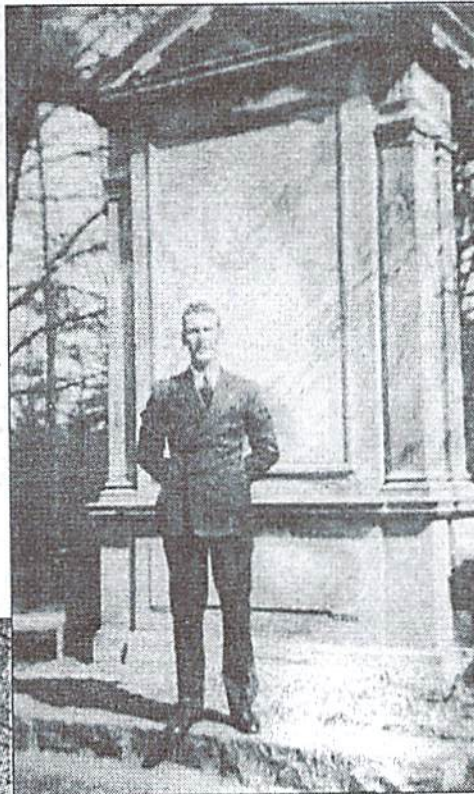
**I**t all started with a walk in the woods.

By JUSTIN GRAEBER, CLIPPER EDITOR  
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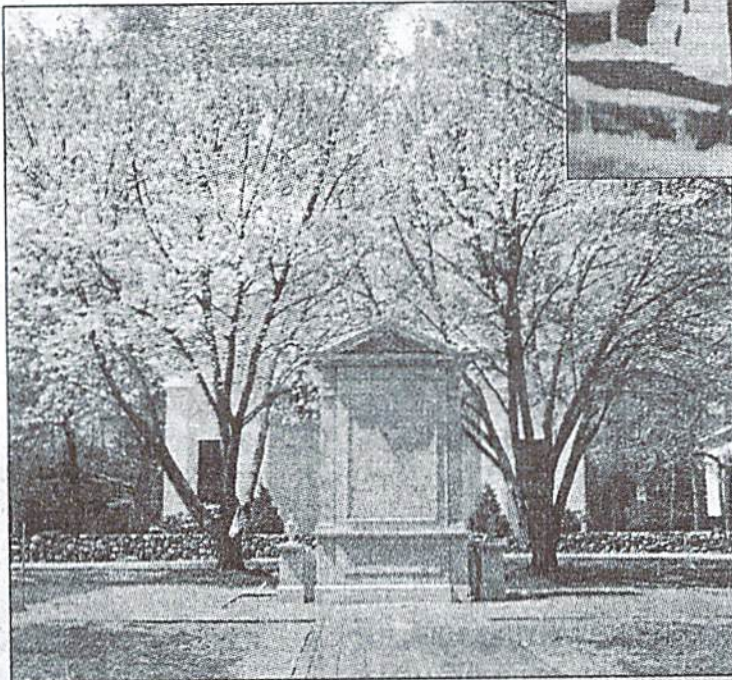
Joe Shea was walking through the woods adjacent to Mayflower Cemetery, working on a series of pamphlets about town cemeteries, when he stumbled upon a pile of limestone.

"I recognized it immediately," Shea said. The pile was the remains of a shattered World War I monument that had been missing for decades. Since then, Shea has led the charge to restore the memorial to its rightful place in Duxbury history.

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**ABOVE:** This photograph helped give the monument committee clues as to how the monument looked before it was destroyed.



**LEFT:** The restored monument sits atop the "stairs to nowhere" in front of the old town hall. Some on the committee believe the monument was always intended to be located here.

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On Memorial Day, the town's annual parade will briefly stop in front of the newly-restored monument. This small moment will be the culmination of many months of hard work for the World War I Monument Committee.

Shea found the monument pieces in the summer of 2008. From there, Town Manager Richard MacDonald appointed a committee to oversee the monument's rehabilitation. In the spring of 2009, the group went in front of Town Meeting to ask for Community Preservation Act funds and later that fall, the ground was cleared and the monument's return to glory began.

The monument lay hidden for years, all but forgotten after it was struck by a vehicle. Shea was actually involved in a search for the monument 30 years earlier, when he and then Fire Chief Howie Blanchard went looking for the monument — which held the name of Blanchard's grandfather. At the time, Shea thought the



**This photo helped the World War I Committee learn what the original monument looked like when it was located in Boomer Square.**

It was destroyed in 1958 in a vehicle accident, the circumstances of which remain unclear.

Shea believes the town always had a desire to restore

to the monument committee. "People talked about Boomer Square and at first I didn't even know where Boomer Square was."

Part of the mystery, which remained even after the remnants were found, was that no one knew what the monument was supposed to look like. Much of the monument was missing.

"It seems like every time it was moved, it left a piece behind," said Shea.

Using the pieces of stone, committee member Pam Smith "reverse engineered" a drawing of what she thought the full monument may have looked like. Still, it was just a guess.

"I spent at least 15 years asking, 'does anyone have

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For years people have asked me, 'what about those stairs to nowhere?' Now that the memorial is there, it seems just right."

—Katherine Pillsbury

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pieces were behind the DPW yard.

"We took the information and searched in all the wrong places," he said.

There was evidence in town records that the monument was built in the 1920's in Boomer Square, the island in front of the Town Hall plaza.

the monument, but the pieces seemed to disappear. In addition to Shea's quest, the missing monument piqued the interest of Katherine Pillsbury, who was, at the time, the town historian.

"It had been a big point of curiosity for me," said Pillsbury, who was later appointed



a photograph of this monument?" said Pillsbury.

After putting out the word, the committee received a photograph from Presque Isle, Maine that showed a man standing in front of the monument. At last, the group had something to work with.

Around the same time, the committee connected with Bryan Felty, a newcomer to town that happened to be an enormous World War I history buff — and had extensive experience with animation.

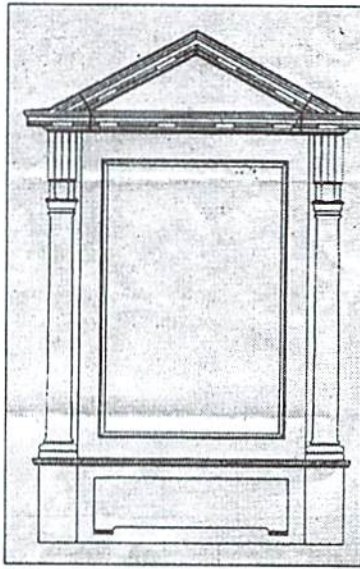
"He's a creative genius," said Shea. "He brought fresh eyes to the problem ... If he hadn't come along, I'm not sure where we would be."

"When I was about 10 years old I bought my first American gas mask at a flea market," said Felty. "I find the romance of that period in history fascinating .... That war just changed everything."

Felty used the drawings and photographs to put together a series of 3D renderings, as well as a short video, that the committee used to sell the project to Town Meeting. With a detailed plan and funding in hand, the monument started to take shape.

A granite company, Monti Granite of Quincy, was hired to oversee the project. They picked up the pieces and sent them to the limestone quarry in Illinois that likely created the original monument.

Just like the original structure in the 20s, limestone to replace missing pieces was carved there. It was then shipped across the country to Quincy for the 82 names, which the committee found in the town archives, to be en-



From this simple drawing the restoration plans were born.

graved. The work is delicate and specialized.

"They have typefaces you've never even heard of," said Shea, pointing out the lettering used on the memorial is unique. "We're calling it Duxbury Serif."

In addition to the CPA money, another group raised funds by selling engraved bricks that were later installed in the brick walkway around the monument.

"We operated on the theory that less is more," said Shea. "We want this to be an open experience that speaks for itself."

The bricks and the concrete base of the monument (the water-absorbing limestone has to be kept off the ground) was installed on Veterans' Day, and the rest of the monument was put together earlier this spring.

If the location of the monument itself, in front of old town hall at the top of the "stairs to nowhere," seems

fitting — that's because it's likely where it was meant to be all along. Committee member Terry Vose recently discovered a drawing of the layout of the Town Hall complex that shows the three buildings — First Parish Church and the two town halls — and in front of everything is the World War I monument.

The landscaping around the monument was just recently finished and what was formerly known as the "stairs to nowhere" in front of Old Town Hall is now home to a fitting remembrance for the town's residents who served in the War to End All Wars, as Pillsbury described it. (The names are of Duxbury residents who served in the war, not necessarily those who were killed.)

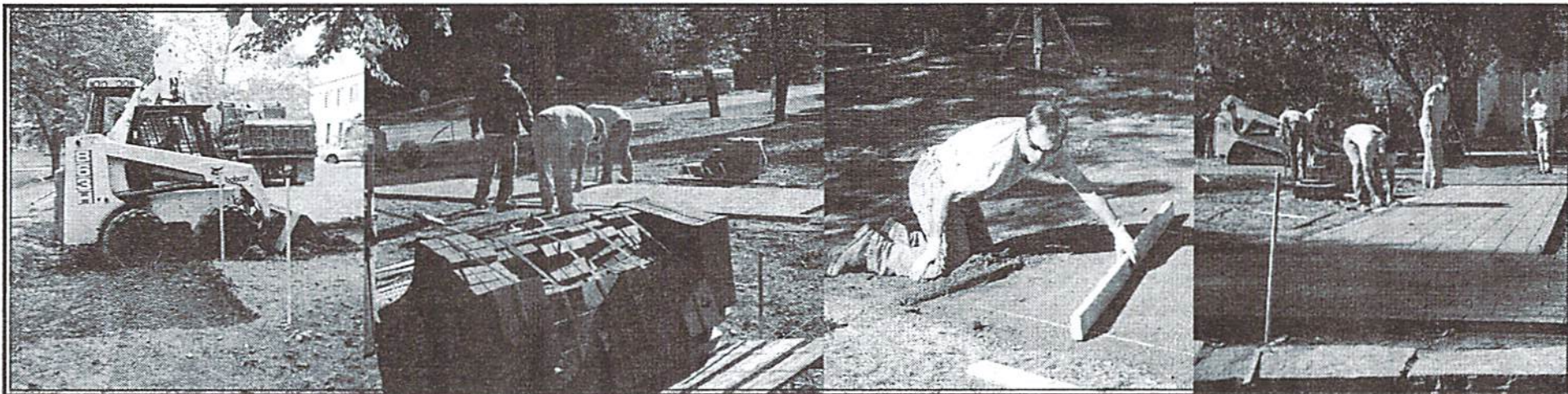
She is pleased with the work of the entire committee, saying that every time the group met a challenge, someone took the reins and overcame it. A veteran himself, Shea said the monument is part of Duxbury's tradition of honoring service.

"The entire committee feels an obligation to military personnel who rise to the occasion. It's very important to a lot of people," he said.

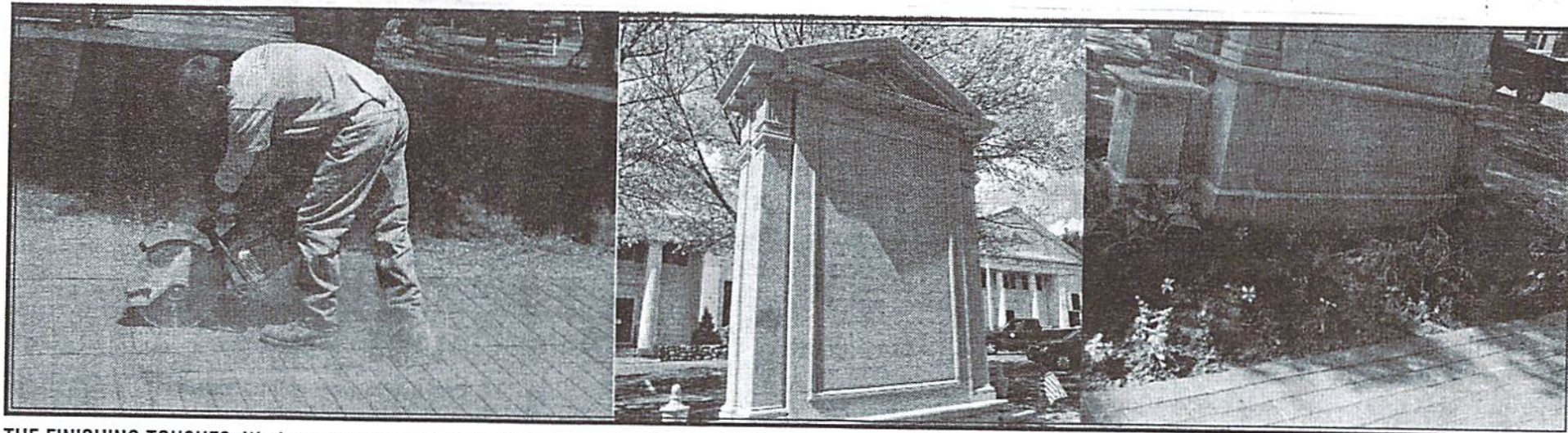
"I'm extremely pleased with it," Pillsbury added. "I think it fits in to the original idea of putting the monument there. For years people have asked me, 'what about those stairs to nowhere?' ... now that the memorial is there, it seems just right."

For more photos and video of the World War I monument project, visit [duxburyclipper.com](http://duxburyclipper.com).





**LAYING THE GROUND WORK:** After Town Meeting voters approved the use of Community Preservation Act funds to restore the monument, workers from Eagle's Nest Landscaping leveled the ground and installed a brick walkway that would eventually lead up to the monument.



**THE FINISHING TOUCHES:** Workers cut out some of the bricks to replace them with the names of donors. They also cut a space in the brick walkway for the original dedication plaque, as well as a stone with the names of War Memorial Committee members. The Community Garden Club finished the project by planting flowers.



*[The following is reprinted from a series in the Clipper detailing some of the names on the World War I monument. Ed.]*

Gladys Reynolds occupies a special niche in the annals of Duxbury history. She was a nurse, and in 1917 she and 69 other Duxburyites, all men, answered the call of President Woodrow Wilson for America to go to war in what was to be the war to end all wars.

## GLADYS B. REYNOLDS

It came to be known simply as World War I.

Gladys Boudman Reynolds was 21 when her country went to war. She was born in Duxbury on June 5, 1896, the daughter of Harvey James Reynolds and Cora Ella Delano Reynolds. Her father was originally from Fitchburg, her mother from an old Duxbury family. They lived on Surplus Street and a Reynolds was raising chickens there well into the 1950s.

Gladys was educated in Duxbury and studied nursing at St. Vincent. She worked as a nurse at what was known as the Corey Neill Hospital in Brookline and at the Massachusetts Hospital in Boston. She enlisted in the nursing corps in Boston on Dec. 18, 1917 and served in France as an army nurse. She was part of the American Expeditionary Force commanded by General John Pershing.

Reynolds and 81 others were part of a monument that for years sat on a small plot known as Boomer Square which lies on the south side of Depot Street where Depot joins Tremont Street in front of the old Town Hall. The land is called Boomer Square because Charles Boomer was the only Duxbury veteran to die during the war, though he never saw combat.

Born and raised in Millbrook, Charles Watson Boomer was educated in Duxbury and worked as a farmer and laborer before trying to enlist in the naval reserve in March of 1917. He was rejected but eventually joined the army and was sworn in on Sept. 5, 1918 at the age of 26. Within 20 days, he would be dead at a hospital in Syracuse, N.Y., the victim of pneumonia.

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**E**ben Briggs was something of a bon vivant in his day.

Writing about him in an October 1988 edition of the Duxbury Clipper, the late Rev. Robert Canon Merry described Mr. Briggs, an army veteran of the World War I era, as the "number one bachelor in Duxbury" and in all of Plymouth County as well.

EBENEZER N. BRIGGS

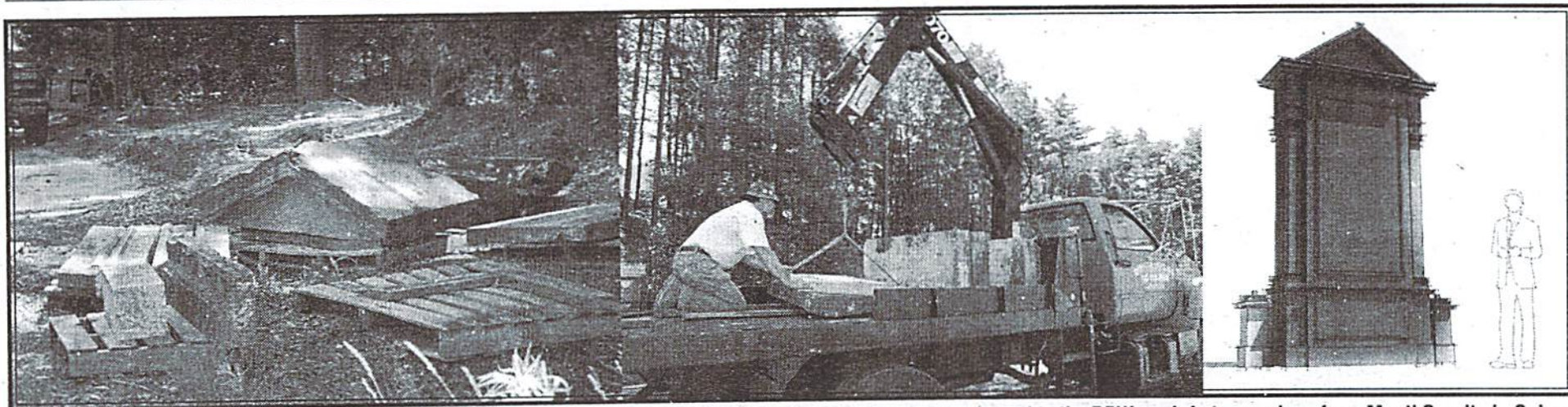
Eben was a sought after guest at the local social scene, wrote Rev. Merry; and sometimes at night during the years of Prohibition, he did some rum running with his Duxbury pals.

The Briggs name is among those etched into the World War I memorial that was dedicated in 1922 on a spot known as Boomer Square at the junction of Depot and Tremont Streets. The monument was removed from the site after being badly damaged and was the subject of a restoration drive by a group of Duxbury residents.

Briggs, born Ebenezer N. Briggs in 1896, was the son of Henry Alton Briggs, originally of Lakeville, and Helen Elizabeth Cushman of Duxbury. He was born on the second floor of the Drew House on Washington Street near where his father operated a stable. He was educated in Duxbury and as a young man worked as a chauffeur. He was drafted into the army and was sworn in at Plymouth on Sept. 2, 1918, a little more than two months before the war ended.

Mr. Briggs spent his life in Duxbury and was a popular figure for decades. He served as fire chief and as a commander at the American Legion. He ran a successful fuel oil company at the corner of Alden Street and Railroad Avenue and in his will, he left \$10,000 to establish a scholarship fund for Duxbury High School graduates.





**FROM PIECES, A WHOLE:** Joe Shea found the pieces of the monument in Mayflower Cemetery, and they were moved to the DPW yard. Later, workers from Monti Granite in Quincy came and removed the broken pieces to begin the restoration. Committee member Bryan Felty provided a 3D rendering of what the restored monument might look like.



**A MONUMENT COMES TOGETHER:** The base of the soon-to-be-restored monument was laid just before Veterans' Day. Eventually, the pieces of the monument were delivered and installed on top of the foundation, including the 82 names of Duxbury residents who served during World War I, or "The War to End All Wars."